NEVADA Connections

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U.S. Department of Education establishes data quality standards for AEFLA-funded programs

—John Griffin, consultant to Nevada Adult Education Office, 775/883-1897, griffinprism@aol.com

We now have not one, but two sets of NRS to consider in the administration of adult education in Nevada. The one most familiar to all of us is, of course, the Nevada Revised Statutes. However, there is a new NRS with which we will need to work as it relates to Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language supported by federal funds under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act: the U. S. Department of Education's NRS State Data Quality Standards.

The NRS is the National Reporting System, an outcome-based reporting system for the state-administered, federally funded adult education programs. The NRS State Data Quality Standards identify the policies, processes and materials that states and local programs must have in place to collect valid and reliable data for the NRS.

The Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) within the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education developed the data quality standards to define the characteristics of high quality state and local data collection systems for the NRS. The standards provide an organized way for DAEL to understand the quality of NRS data collection within the states and also provide guidance to states on how to improve their systems.

The standards are organized into four content areas that define high quality data collection systems. The four content areas are: data foundation and structure, data collection and verification, data analysis and reporting, and staff development. In each content area, specific standards are set which establish whether the state's administration is of acceptable, superior, or exemplary quality. (Note that there is no provision for shoddy quality!) States are required to comply with this accountability endeavor as quickly as possible, in line with rapidly approaching deadlines.

The Adult Education Office of the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) has activated a Technical Advisory Committee comprised of people who know the details of Nevada information technology systems and how they interface with adult education data collection and verification efforts. This interface becomes especially critical in the required areas of student identification and follow-up.

Technical Advisory Committee Members

Claudia Bianca-DeBay	TMCC Adult Basic Education
John Griffin	Former NV and Nat'l ABE Director
Sharon McCallen	NDE Career, Technical & Adult Ed.
Mary Katherine Moen	NDE Adult Education Consultant
Sharyn Yanoshak	NV ABE Leadership Team
Ken Zutter	Just Right for Nevada Database

The Committee has met three times and has started evaluating Nevada's status relating to the federal requirements and begun to develop approaches and detailed plans to meet them. As the results of their efforts become available, and certainly before they are implemented, the NDE will secure input from ABE/ESL practitioners statewide.

Compliance with both the state and the national NRS is not optional. We plan to make the highest and best use of it we can!

Want results? Do a project!

Much of the information in this piece was excerpted from the excellent article, "Project-Based Learning: a Primer," by Gwen Solomon, *Technology & Learning*, January 2003, pp. 20-30, www.techlearning.com

What is it?

According to Gwen Solomon, director of TechLearning.com and co-author of *Connect Online: Web Learning Adventures*, project-based learning (PBL) involves students working in groups to solve challenging problems that are authentic, curriculum-based, and often interdisciplinary. Learners decide how to approach a problem and what activities to pursue. They gather information from a variety of sources and synthesize, analyze, and derive knowledge from it. Their learning is inherently valuable because it's connected to something real and involves adult skills such as collaboration and reflection. At the end, students demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge and are judged by how much they've learned and how well they communicate it. Throughout this process, the teacher's role is to guide and advise (rather than to direct and manage) student work.

> "I discovered that it (project-based learning) is one of the most exciting ways for an adult student to learn just about anything in a fun and interesting classroom with the teacher acting as the facilitator and the students actually directing and designing the curriculum."
>
> —Kay Perry, Texas A&M University, *Literacy Links*, July 1999

Does it work?

Despite the lack of a large body of data (especially for adult students), evidence suggests that PBL is effective. For example, a soon-to-be-released report from WestEd, *From Promise to Practice A National Project-Based Learning Action Agenda Integrating Research and Capacity-Building*, states that PBL "has the potential to 'cover the curriculum' while promoting more in-depth exploration of central, standards-based concepts." These result in "meaningful academic outcomes," such as in-depth understanding of issues and concepts, better retention of learned skills, and the ability to apply them in new contexts. The report notes that because PBL engages reluctant students, it can accommodate the needs of a diverse population, creating a learning environment that is more equitable for kids from different backgrounds.

In addition, evaluators of the Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project found that students spent much more time engaged in complex thinking while authoring and designing presentations. They were also likely to spend more time interpreting and transforming research information and attending to issues of presentation coherence and audience attention than were their counterparts in comparison classrooms. These students were very focused on a critical activity teachers say they typically try to avoid: revising their work.

PBL and Standardized Testing

Most promising are results that show PBL impacts standardized test performance. Outside evaluators for Co-nect schools, for example, whose reform-based approach relies heavily on PBL and technology integration, found that students who develop PBL skills also perform particularly well on standardized tests. In general, Co-nect schools gained almost 26 percent more in test scores in all subject areas than control schools.

> According to John Thomas, author of "A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning," the positive impact on standardized test scores — especially in math and reading — is remarkable in that PBL doesn't directly target the basic skills tapped by these tests.

At a Title I Co-nect school in Memphis, TN., for example, students attaining "proficient" level in writing scores soared from 6 percent to 77 percent in just two years. The connection? According to the study, PBL. In one cross-curricular project, students planned a trip up and down the Mississippi River by contacting cities, places, to visit, and restaurants along the way. They plotted their journey, calculated distances, time, and costs, and organized their virtual trip. In another project, high school students mentored elementary children to create music CDs based on

local culture. They researched blues traditions, learned the costs and engineering required to use the music studio, and burned a CD. The students (including the high school mentors) showed increases in math scores. In the project school, not only were the students able to apply their mathematical knowledge, but they also scored significantly higher on the national exam. In addition, results show that students at the textbook school soon forgot what they had learned. The projects students remembered.

Other findings are similar. In a Vanderbilt University study, for example, students worked for five weeks on a project focused on how basic principles of geometry relate to architecture and design. Students of all skill levels made significant gains in their ability to answer traditional test items covering scale, volume, perimeter, area, and other geometry concepts.

Criteria for PBL

According to the Autodesk Foundation, "PBL is at the heart of good instruction because it brings together intellectual inquiry, rigorous real-world standards, and student engagement in relevant and meaningful work." Well-crafted projects:

- engage and build on student interests and passions,
- provide a meaningful and authentic context for learning,
- immerse students in complex, real-world problems/investigations without a predetermined solution,
- allow students to take the lead, making critical choices and decisions,
- connect students with community resourced and experts,
- require students to develop and demonstrate essential skills and knowledge,
- draw on multiple disciplines to solve problems and deepen understanding,
- build in opportunities for reflection and self-assessment,
- result in useful products that demonstrate what students have learned, and
- culminate in exhibitions or presentations to an authentic audience.

Elements of a Great PBL Project

Projects should be based on standards, have clear goals, and promote interdisciplinary content. Students should make the decisions for all aspects of the project — from selecting a topic to designing the project to organizing work to presenting results. Students should learn collaborative skills, such as team research, group decision making, relying on each other's work, and providing, accepting, and integrating feedback.

Projects should have a connection to the real world by focusing on issues that affect students' lives or communities and by using realistic methods such as polling, researching, and experimenting. Projects should incorporate a nontraditional approach to time on task. More time facilitates the freedom to experiment and learn from trial and error and opportunities for in-depth study.

Evaluations should focus on ongoing demonstrations of what students are learning and how well they can communicate it. Peer reviews, teacher evaluations, self-reflection, and community feedback can all play a role.

More info and sample projects

* The July 1999 issue of *Literacy Links*, published by the Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning focuses on project-based learning and includes several sample projects for adults, including those in family literacy programs. There are six pages of resources, including a full page of helpful Web sites. You may access *Literacy Links* at http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/ (click on "newsletter", then on "1999"); for a hard copy, contact Bob d'Orleans, 702/651-4974.
* The December 2000 and December 1998 issues of *Focus on Basics* contain some excellent articles about and examples of project-based learning (e.g., voter registration, building a Web site in an ABE class, etc.). They are accessible from the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) Web site: http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/, click on publications, search *Focus on Basics* by topic.

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Connecting resources for Nevada's adult workforce

Professional development in April

There are four free workshops offered this month through ABE leadership funds and are available to all adult educators in Nevada on a space available base. Contact the appropriate host to reserve a seat!

Title/date/place	Host (contact)	Presenter and objectives
Cooperative Learning 4/11/03, Reno	Paul Marsala Truckee Meadows Comm. Coll. 775/829-9026, pmarsala@tmcc.edu	Sally Scott . Learn the difference between cooperative learning and group working. Understand the rationale for using cooperative learning. Integrate cooperative learning into lesson plans.
ESL 101 Part 1 4/11/03 Elko	Meachell LaSalle Great Basin College 775/753-2109 meachell@gbcnv.edu	Maxine Frauman-Prickel. Define the basic elements that contribute to language acquisition. Identify classroom strategies for developing listening and speaking skills in adult ESL students. Describe cooperative-learning structures that foster language acquisition.
ESL 101 Part II 4/12/03 Elko	Meachell LaSalle Great Basin College 775/753-2109 meachell@gbcnv.edu	Maxine Frauman-Prickel. Define the basic elements that contribute to language acquisition. Identify classroom strategies for developing reading and writing skills for beginning and intermediate adult ESL students. Describe cooperative learning structures that foster reading and writing in a second language.
Learning Disabilities Part II 4/18/03, Las Vegas	Connie Barker C.A.L.L. 702/507-3534 barkerm@lvccld.org	Lyn Pizor. Recognize learning differences. Find strategies to help LD students succeed. Know where to refer students for help.

Cowboy up! For MPAEA at Boomtown, April 23-26. Visit www.mpaea.org for registration and conference information, or contact Board Member Julee Henson: 702/799-8655, ext. 342, jahenson@interact.ccsd.net.

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